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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

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FRENCH SOMALILAND



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

WARNING

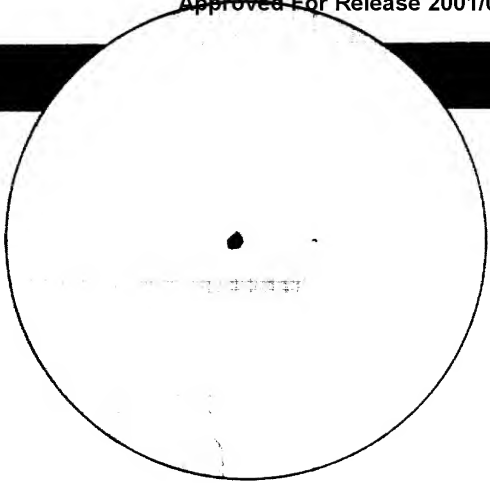
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FRENCH SOMALILAND



The people of French Somaliland (la Côte Française des Somalis) will go to the polls on Sunday, 19 March 1967, to determine the political future of the one remaining French Overseas Territory in Africa. By casting a white ballot in the affirmative or a blue ballot in the negative they will answer the question "Do you want the territory to remain within the French Republic with the new governmental and administrative status, the basic details of which have already been brought to your attention?" This referendum raises questions concerning the future of the economy of French Somaliland (heretofore financed by France), the relationship between Ethiopia and Somalia, and the stability of the entire Horn of Africa. In the referendum of September 1958, French Somaliland voted by a 2 to 1 margin to remain in the Republic. Dissatisfaction with the government and agitation for independence has, however, been slowly increasing in the past several years. Ethiopia, already harassed by dissidence in Eritrea and the Ogaden, is apprehensive over the fate of its most important rail outlet to the sea. Both Ethiopia and the Somali Republic are aware that an independent French Somaliland would be a weak state, and both are concerned over the possibility that the territory might come under the control of the other.

Physical Setting

French Somaliland is a tiny pocket of rocky ridges and salt flats situated at the western end of the Gulf of Aden. It is less than 24 miles across the waters of Bab al Mandab from Yemen and South Arabia. International borders total only 320 miles, of which 282 miles are with Ethiopia and 38 miles are with the Somali Republic. The major feature of the coast is the Bay of Tadjoura, which extends inland some 60 miles from the Gulf of Aden and provides an excellent deepwater anchorage, a rare feature of the east coast of Africa. The port of Djibouti, situated on the southern shore of the bay, a short distance from the Gulf of Aden, is the administrative center, the only significant urban area, and the economic heart of the territory. Djibouti is the terminus of the Franco-Ethiopian Railroad (Compagnie du Chemin de Fer-Ethiopia de Djibouti à Addis Ababa), which links it to Addis Ababa 325 air miles to the southwest. The port of Aden on the coast of South Arabia is 160 miles to the northeast.

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Most of the 8,900 square miles of French Somaliland are forbidding, rocky desert. Black volcanic rocks contrast sharply with white salt wasteland. Over much of the area angular ridges overlook boulder-strewn valleys. Level surfaces along the coast and in interior basins are comprised of unproductive salty clay soils. Two interior basins contain large, shallow salt lakes, and salt marshes are found in a number of the smaller basins. There are no fresh-water lakes. Most of the coast of the Bay of Tadjoura rises steeply from the water, but near the Gulf of Aden the shore flattens into a plain that extends north and south along the Gulf of Aden. Natural vegetation is limited almost exclusively to thorny bushes, separated by patches of bare ground. Only along the slopes of the ridges north of the Bay of Tadjoura, where elevations rise to 3,000 feet and more is there true forest cover. Here, euphorbia, juniper, camphor, and incense are found. Occasional palms dot the dry streambeds, indicating a source of subsurface moisture.

Precipitation usually occurs in the form of thunderstorms that vary in frequency and intensity. At Djibouti, where the only weather station with a reasonable length of record is located, the mean annual precipitation is 5.1 inches and no month averages more than 1.0 inch. By comparison, the mean annual precipitation at Phoenix, Arizona is 7.62 inches. At any location more rain may fall in one afternoon than is customarily recorded in an entire year. High temperatures cause rapid evaporation and further lessen rainfall effectiveness. In the 63 years of record at Djibouti, the lowest recorded temperature is 63°F. The coolest months are January and February, when daily maximums are about 83°F. and daily minimums are near 72°F. In July and August, early morning temperatures are usually about 72°F. and afternoon temperatures are 103°F. to 105°F. Warm, dusty winds, not uncommon at any time of the year, are particularly frequent from June through September. A hot, dry northwest wind frequently rises after midday and carries over into the evening hours. Occasionally, wind velocities exceed 50 miles per hour. These winds from the interior may bring temperature increases of as much as 15°F. to 20°F.

Water is at a premium everywhere in French Somaliland. Except for the few hours immediately following a thunderstorm, there is no surface water. While drilled wells supply settlements, most rural people obtain meager supplies of brackish water by digging into the beds of wadis.

Transportation

Transportation in French Somaliland is centered on Djibouti, the terminus of the Franco-Ethiopian Railroad. This 486-mile, meter-gauge line is the only important bulk carrier in the territory and is one of the main reasons for Ethiopia's interest in the forthcoming referendum. From the time it began operations in 1917 until 1952 it was Addis Ababa's only access route to the coast; the sea may now be reached by highway, however—by the 550-mile road to Assab and the 750-mile road to Massawa. Joint French-Ethiopian ownership of the railroad was established by a treaty in 1959 which provided for Ethiopian use of facilities in Djibouti without extra-territorial rights. The railroad enters French Somaliland

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Referendum

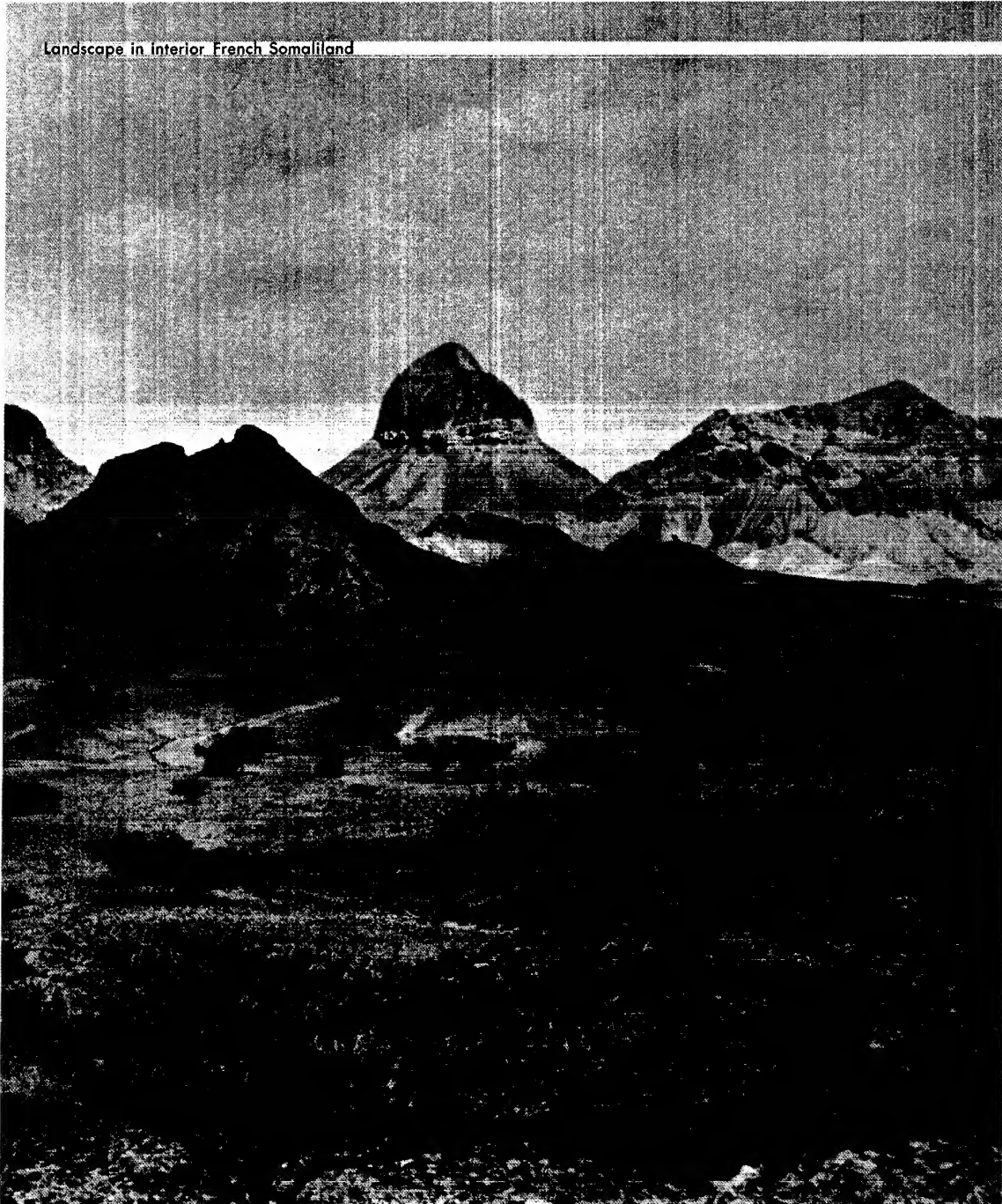
The registration of eligible voters for the coming referendum closed on 15 February 1967. Persons wishing to register were required to produce documents supporting a claim to 3 years of residence in French Somaliland. During the period of Djibouti's recent growth, the Afar population in the city increased from 2,500 to 4,000 while the Somali population jumped from 22,000 to 40,000; the population of the rural area has remained relatively stable. Many of the newly arrived Somalis are Issack from former British Somaliland. Although the French have virtually ignored the border with Ethiopia, they have at times closely controlled the Somali frontier and that border is now officially closed. In the fall of 1966 several thousand Somalis who could not produce identity papers and some who could were trucked the 12 miles back to the Somali Republic border at Loyada. About

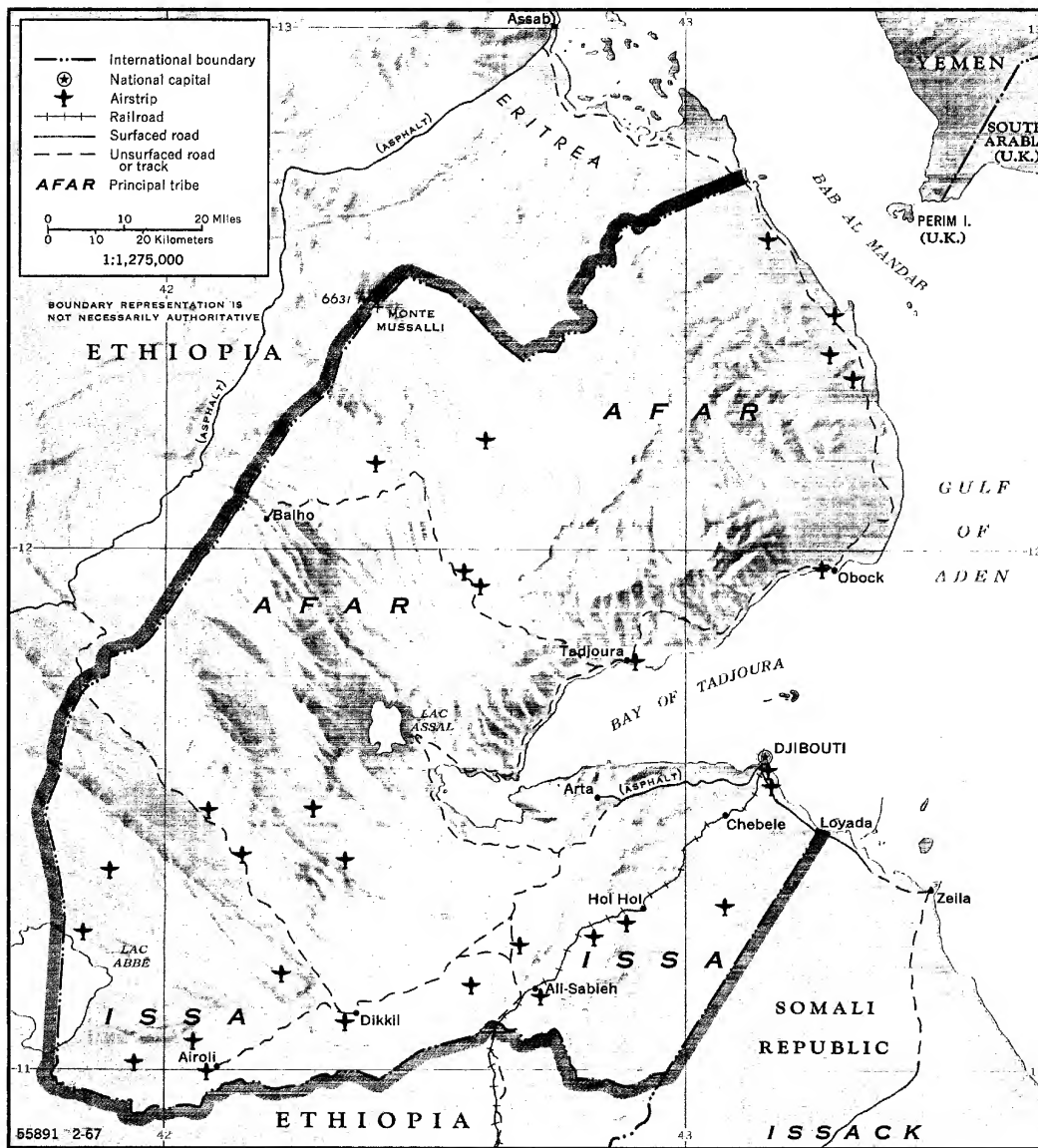
the same time a barbed wire fence was constructed on the outskirts of Djibouti to control entry to the city.

Thus far, the number of new registrants has not been announced. As of 30 July 1963, when some 60,000 residents were considered French citizens, 28,728 persons were registered to vote in French Somaliland, 10,102 in Djibouti. At this time, in addition to 3,951 Europeans and Arabs, 16,404 persons were registered in predominantly Afar districts and 8,373 in predominantly Somali districts.

The Somali Republic looks upon French Somaliland as a portion of "Greater Somalia." Djibouti and the Franco-Ethiopian Railroad, however, are important to the economic interests of Ethiopia. Accurate information on many aspects of the current scene in French Somaliland remains sparse, but it is likely that the territory will continue to be an economic liability and an area of contention between Ethiopia and the Somali Republic regardless of the outcome of the referendum.

Landscape in Interior French Somaliland





adjoining areas of the French Somaliland, Ethiopia, and the Somali Republic. There is a considerable overlap of Issa and Afar people in southwestern French Somaliland, an area in which these tribes have clashed for generations. The Issa are conscious of belonging to a "Somali nation" and have taken an active part in agitation against the French in Djibouti.

Issack people are sometimes referred to in Djibouti, where they now number over 20,000, as "foreign Somalis." Their traditional homeland is in the former British Somaliland. Although many Issack have come to Djibouti within the last 3 years, they have long been active in local politics and have supplied significant numbers of men to the security forces. Many Issack are employed in the government's civil service and by the Europeans of Djibouti. Characteristically, the Issack maintain close ties with relatives in the Somali Republic. It is not unusual for an Issack to support a family in Djibouti and a family in the tribal area and to hold both French and Somali citizenship. Many Issack support the "Greater Somalia" concept.

The Arabs of French Somaliland originated in Yemen and South Arabia and are now found almost exclusively in Djibouti. They number between 8,000 and 10,000 and are primarily traders. Some Yemeni cultivate small truck gardens on the outskirts of Djibouti. An estimated

1,000 Asians, mostly Indians, also operate small businesses in Djibouti. Mindful of recent events in Zanzibar, neither of these groups has taken an active role in recent political activity, but Radio Cairo is popular among the Arabs and a number of Arab youths are associated with the Somali political parties.

European civilians number about 6,000 and are primarily residents of Djibouti. Many are French administrators and some are French who are employed on the railroad, in the port, and in banking. European businessmen, however, are largely of Greek or Armenian extraction. The technician class is made up of Italians, many of whom have come south from Eritrea. French Somaliland has been a particularly desirable post for Frenchmen because of the salary differential and the opportunity to escape the Metropole income tax. In addition, there are no taxes on business profits, real estate, or bank accounts. Europeans are the major local consumers of goods and services in Djibouti. Few benefits trickle down to the native population and very little of the income of European residents of Djibouti is invested in the territory.

Military forces consist of something over 3,000 French troops: the 13th Demi Brigade of the Foreign Legion, several companies of infantry, some artillery units, and small elements of the Navy and Air Force.

about 6 miles southwest of Ali-Sabieh and proceeds northeastward, mostly over rough terrain, 63 miles to Djibouti. Between the border and Djibouti there are 20 bridges, including 2 that are more than 450 feet long—1 at Chebele, 10 miles southwest of Djibouti, and 1 at Hol Hol, 29 miles southwest of Djibouti. Within French Somaliland and for some 75 to 100 miles west of the border in Ethiopia, the track runs through country populated by potentially dissident Somali tribesmen. The railroad is additionally vulnerable to interruption because it parallels the border of the Somali Republic at distances of 10 to 20 miles.

Road travel over much of the territory is slow, rough, and dusty and is accomplished best in vehicles equipped with four-wheel drive. The only existing paved highways, 25 miles in length, are all in the vicinity of Djibouti. In addition, there are about 1,000 miles of poorly maintained dirt roads and motorable tracks, and numerous natural-surface tracks fan out across the territory. Tracks frequently follow wadi beds that are subject to flash floods after cloudbursts. Many stretches of road are impassable after thundershowers, and travel on some roads is slowed frequently by drifting sand. Cross-country movement is good along the coast to the south of Djibouti toward the Somali Republic and northward from the vicinity of Obock to Eritrea; elsewhere it is generally poor.

In a region where flying weather is generally good, the French have found light aircraft the most convenient mode of travel. Some 28 natural-surface airstrips are scattered over the territory. Only at the airfield at Djibouti, however, is there a paved runway capable of handling all aircraft used by international airlines.

Economy

Saline soils, high temperatures, blowing sands, and the lack of water combine to limit the agricultural potential of the area. A maximum of 300 acres—less than half a square mile—is presently cultivated in French Somaliland. The most successful farmers cultivate some 200 gardens that provide vegetables for the city markets. In the unlikely event that irrigation water is made available, an additional 7,400 acres or so—about 17 square miles—might be cultivated. Some 500,000 to 600,000 animals forage on marginal grazing lands; sheep, goats, and camels dig out the roots of tough grasses, strip the branches from small bushes, and eat the bark off the trees.

Food consumed by the urban population is largely imported. Some 5,000 sheep and 50,000 goats are imported officially each year, but no estimate can be made of animals driven across the border illegally. Live poultry is imported from Ethiopia, and fresh vegetables and fruit are obtained from Ethiopia, Aden, and Yemen. Europeans in French Somaliland receive ample supplies of frozen, canned, and bottled goods through the port. Each day Ethiopian Airlines flies in more than 2 tons of kat (qat)—a mild narcotic leaf chewed like tobacco or snuff; retailing at more than \$2 per pound, kat challenges food crops for space on the farmland of the territory and competes for the food dollar in the city markets.

The major businesses in Djibouti—clearing houses, groceries, pharmacies, machine shops, banks, and an ice plant—cater to the shipping industry. The port of Djibouti offers fuel and water to passing ships, and almost half of the shipping entering Djibouti makes the call solely for these services. Some 85 percent of the cargo handled at the port either is destined for or originated in Ethiopia. By weight, the port handled 30 percent of all of Ethiopia's imports and 20 percent of

all her exports in the first 6 months of 1966. By value, 40 to 45 percent of all of Ethiopia's exports, more than half of which was coffee, passed through Djibouti during the same period. All goods carried between Ethiopia and Djibouti are handled by the Franco-Ethiopian Railroad.

Income derived from the port and railroad fall far short of meeting the financial needs of the territory, and it has been sustained by French subsidies, including funds channeled through FIDES (*Fonds d'Investissement et de Développement Economique et Social*). Without the railroad and, in particular, the French payments, the economic life of Djibouti would approximate the lassitude of its underdeveloped hinterland.

Population

The best estimates of the population of the territory are from French sources that are not always in detailed agreement. Data derived from these sources for 1961 and 1963 indicate a population of 80,000 to 83,000, with about half of the total in Djibouti. Governor Louis Saget in September 1966, however, referred to a population in excess of 100,000, including 62,000 in Djibouti. The growing population of Djibouti includes new arrivals who have come in from the desert to enjoy the advantages of city life under French rule. A laborer on the Djibouti docks may, for example, earn as much as \$2 per day—three times as much as he could earn in the Somali Republic. The opportunities for schooling and medical care afforded Djibouti residents are unequaled elsewhere in French Somaliland or in neighboring areas. Shortages of food and water in the unproductive and overgrazed countryside further increase the attraction of the city.

The people of French Somaliland are divided into six distinctive communities. Each of these communities has internal factions, and each is concerned primarily with its own affairs. There is little feeling for Djibouti as a city or, until the last year or two, for French Somaliland as a political entity. Most of the population is nominally Muslim, a factor that has no perceptible unifying influence. The major groupings include the Afar, natives related to Ethiopian peoples; the Issa, Somali natives related to people in both Ethiopia and the Somali Republic; the Issack (Issak or Is'hak), "foreigners" from the Somali Republic; the Arabs; Europeans; and Asians.

The Afar—called Danakil in Ethiopia—are the largest single tribal element. They number about 42,000, some 4,000 of whom are in Djibouti. Most of the Afar are villagers or nomadic herders scattered over the northern and western sectors of the territory. Their tribal area covers about 75 percent of French Somaliland. Some 250,000 fellow tribesmen live in northeastern Ethiopia. Tribal relationship, however, is no guarantee of mutual understanding. The Afar of the Obock area are traditional rivals of the Afar of the Tadjoura area, and the Djibouti Afar tend to disagree, particularly, with the conservative Tadjoura group. Aversion to Somalis generally overrides internal bickering among the Afar, and the French administration has consistently favored the Afar over the Somali in the territory.

The Issa tribe is the largest Somali grouping in French Somaliland. Because the tribesmen drift back and forth across boundaries and generally appear wherever life appears to be the best at the moment, the Issa population is particularly difficult to assess. There are probably about 28,000 Issa in the territory, with about 20,000 of these (nearly half of the Somali population) in Djibouti; some 8,000 Issa live in the rural areas south and west of Djibouti. They are representatives of a tribe of 80,000 to 100,000 people who are scattered across

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